

Holy Week: Monday April 6th

Scripture: John 12:1-11 *Mary anoints the feet of Jesus*

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Today's meditation: Ways to Honour at Home

Barbara Brown Taylor, from *An Altar in the World*:

"All I am saying is that anyone can do this. Anyone can ask and anyone can bless, whether anyone has authorized you to do it or not. All I am saying is that the world needs you to do this, because there is a real shortage of people willing to kneel wherever they are and recognize the holiness holding its sometimes bony, often tender, always life-giving hand above their heads. That we are able to bless one another at all is evidence that we have been blessed, whether we can remember when or not. That we are willing to bless one another is miracle enough to stagger the very stars."

Jesus is just stopping by for dinner, and his feet are anointed with valuable perfumed oil. This moment was rich and extraordinary. This moment was the right moment to pause and honour Jesus; This Holy Week finds us doing something we often see in scripture, but which modern institutional religion sometimes forgets to remind us to do: finding a way to bring honour, worship and praise to ordinary moments, to settings which we so often treat as unworthy of our finest, our attention, our gratitude. To find that even in our own homes, a moment of reverence and absolute love is possible.

This Monday of holy week, I encourage you to visit each part of your home with these questions: What does this home tell me about how I have been blessed, and the blessings I am called to share with the world? What is a valuable gift which I have to give? What items in this place remind me of Jesus' teachings to love and serve?

Exercise: Do you have an altar space set up in your home? If you do not and you're curious about what it's like to set one up, check out the Minister's Musings post titled 'A Place to Pause'. If you do have one- what item would you place there to remind you of Jesus' presence among us, in our homes, in these times? What is something special you could do to keep our Holy Week stories front and center?

Holy Week: Tuesday April 7th

Scripture: John 12:20-36 *Jesus foretells his death*

Today's Meditation: Walking with Today's Light

This passage is another fine example of the mystical, befuddling language in John. Some opposites are set up to help the people understand why this teacher and leader they've come to respect is going to die in a not-so-respectful way. *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

From all this we hear that the hour has come: Jesus knows his journey towards Jerusalem will end with his death. And life and love for all. Following Jesus to Jerusalem, following Jesus in living for justice and peace, was never going to be an easy journey. So if reading this again brings discomfort, our scripture today reminds us that even in the uncomfortable states of agitation, confusion, anxiety and grief, we are not alone. Jesus has been there too. Now what?

Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Exercise: I invite you to go out in the metaphorical light, in these metaphorically dark times. Perhaps you've already been out for a walk around your neighbourhood recently. What would it be like to change something about your routine walk or outdoor-time, so that you are intentionally sharing light along the way? Some examples that might work for you:

- Choosing a mantra or prayer to center you as you walk: for example, *may all who dwell here be well*. Repeat this aloud or silently as you pass each house.
- Bringing some chalk and leaving a small and simple mark in various places; perhaps a heart, or a star, or a kind word or phrase
- Is there a piece of scripture, a poem or some other writing you've found nourishing lately? Bring a copy with you and pause at various points on your journey- at least 3 times!- to re-read it, and reflect on it in a fresh setting.

Holy Week: Wednesday April 8th

Scripture: John 13:21-32 *one of you will betray me*

Today's Meditation: The Same Reunion Awaits Judas

By A. Philip Parham in *Letting God: Christian Meditations for Recovery*

"A legend about the final judgment day describes everyone in heaven joyfully celebrating: singing, dancing and embracing their loved ones. Everyone is jubilant except Jesus, who is standing sadly at the gates to heaven looking out. Asked why he is not joining in the joy all around him, Jesus answers, "I am waiting for Judas." This story should touch every person's heart. God in Christ is such pure, forgiving love that he yearns to embrace his betrayer. All his followers let him down and were restored to fellowship with him. The same reunion awaits Judas. Each of us has sold out Christ many times in many ways. We all have some Judas in us. Yet we are always welcome, even at the last day."

Have you ever been at a gathering of any kind- and something was said which at the time you assumed was nothing, or you assumed the context was insignificant; and later you realized *oh so THAT'S what was happening*. According to the John telling, no one knew that Jesus told Judas to go and do what he was going to do. But he knew the role hurt and betrayal would play in the days to come.

Exercise: Witnessing to the terrible things in life is something we don't enjoy doing, and for good reason. We've been surrounded by what could easily be identified as *bad news* for a while now. The flow of it is so overwhelming that even compassionate, informed people could drown if we chose to be as 'fully informed' as we usually tend to be.

But in the flood you've been exposed to, what has been missing? What voices have you not heard from in a while? What is happening in this world, somehow hidden in the sheer volume of information? Rather than avoiding the news today, I invite you to do as Peter did and ask something like, what terrible thing is playing out and I just don't know it? Pick just one thing. *How is COVID-19 impacting a nation you've never visited, somewhere far from here? How is COVID-19 directly or indirectly impacting refugees in Bangladesh, people in prisons, people whose circumstances are totally different from your own? What about the other types of suffering in the world which surely have not stopped?* Seek information on one thing. Choose to hold the pain of that one thing and bear witness to suffering you do not personally know. And pray for those more directly affected. Is someone, or some collective, directly responsible for the suffering you're now more aware of? Can you pray for them too?

Holy Week: Maundy Thursday, April 9th

Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35 *Jesus leads the disciples in foot washing*

Today's Meditation: Giving and Receiving, Receiving and Giving

An excerpt from *Holy Thursday: Take a Blessing* by Jan Richardson:

"On the night that Jesus takes up his basin and towel and begins to wash the feet of his disciples, Simon Peter learns how difficult and how wondrous it can be to "take a blessing," as St. Brigid put it. He resists, then allows himself to receive, the grace of it dripping from his toes.

This blessing will indeed require something of Simon Peter and of his fellow disciples. When Jesus has finished the washing, put on his robe, put away his towel and bowl, he turns to them and says, "Do you know what I have done to you?...If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you," Jesus continues, "servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

You are blessed if you do them.

A blessing is not finished until we let it do its work within us and then pass it along, an offering grounded in the love that Jesus goes on to speak of this night. Yet we cannot do this—as the disciples could not do this—until we first allow ourselves to simply receive the blessing as it is offered: as gift, as promise, as sign of a world made whole."

We are challenged right now in our giving and our receiving. In some ways we each need so much more support than ever before, and the other ways we've been supported have faded into the background. Similarly, we each feel drawn to help, to contribute, to be useful, yet in some ways there's nothing we can do, or the skills we have don't fit where they used to- our whole calendar has been thrown out the window! The good news is, we are not alone in how awkward this feels. I've heard similar sentiments from nearly everyone I've spoken with.

Exercise: In prayer, or perhaps while walking today, call to mind ways you have experienced blessing in the generous offering of others- ways you have received their care. In reflecting on this, have some regrets or laments come up? Hold these in prayer too. In all of this, know that you are not alone! If you can, join us on Zoom this afternoon for our weekly check-in, this time with an Agape Meal. Is this a good day to find someone to talk with... a friend or family member you've been meaning to check in with? A member of the pastoral care team, or Tif? Each day, but today especially, might be a day to bless one another with our presence- even if it has to be by phone, or Zoom, or email!

Holy Week: Good Friday, April 10th

Scripture: John 18:1-19:42 *The betrayal, trial and crucifixion of Jesus*

Check out the 'United Church of Canada: Central Vancouver Island' Youtube channel for our reflection today.

On the Brechinunited.ca website, under 'Online Church' there is a links page. There, you can find links to a Stations of the Cross you can print off to walk if you want.

Exercise: With physical distancing in place, can you go somewhere special today? Somewhere you haven't been in recent weeks, or somewhere special to you? Consider bringing this poem along for reflection and prayer. Perhaps use the blank space alongside this prayer to journal:

'Save us From the TRUTH' by Bruce Sanguin

O Holy One,
this search for truth
and its infinitely receding horizon
frustrates our need to nail it down.
Humour us, will you?
Freeze the horizon,
and fix a point that assures us
of truth's location.

Or convince us, once and for all,
that we wouldn't know what to do with truth
if we held it in our hands,
and remind us that whenever we try to nail you down,
you always rise up
and go ahead of us—
luring us toward the Mystery
beyond our intellect.

Grant us the grace of Jeremiah and Jesus,
who spoke not a word
until you had reached out and touched their mouths
with heart wisdom
capable of toppling empires
and raising up a kin-dom of "nuisances and nobodies"*
who concern themselves not with the truth
but with walking in the way;
lightly upon Earth,
humbly with all God's creatures,

and grateful for your holy company.
Amen.

*Thanks to John Dominic Crossan for this image. John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

Holy Week: Holy Saturday

Scripture: John 19:38-42 *Joseph and Nicodemus place Jesus in the tomb*

Check out the 'Minister's Musings' page under 'Online Church' at Brechinunited.ca for a Holy Saturday reflection.

Exercise: With physical distancing in place, can you go somewhere special today? Somewhere you haven't been in recent weeks, or somewhere special to you? Consider bringing this poem along for reflection and prayer. Perhaps use the blank space alongside this poem to journal:

Jan Richardson, 'A Blessing for the Brokenhearted':

Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking
makes us stronger
or that it is better
to have this pain
than to have done
without this love.

Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound
when every day
our waking
opens it anew.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken

can go on beating,
as if it were made
for precisely this—

as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it

as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still

as if it trusts
that its own stubborn
and persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.

Holy Week: Easter Sunday, April 12th

Scripture: John 20:1-18 *Mary and the empty tomb*

Check out the 'United Church of Canada: Central Vancouver Island' Youtube channel for our reflection today.

Exercise: With physical distancing in place, can you go somewhere special today? Somewhere you haven't been in recent weeks, or somewhere special to you? Consider bringing this poem along for reflection and prayer. Perhaps use the blank space alongside this poem to journal:

Anne Weems, 'And the Glory':

The silence breaks into morning.
That One Star lights the world.
The lily springs to life and
not even Solomon...

Let it begin with singing
and never end!
Oh, angels, quit your lamenting!

Oh, pilgrims,

Upon your knees in tearful prayer,
rise up
and take your hearts
and run!

We who were no people

are named anew

God's people,

For he who was no more

Is forevermore.